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SUBJECT: PM ABE'S EUROPEAN TOUR: STRENGTHENING TIES WITH  
"NATURAL PARTNERS"

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Joseph R. Donovan. Reasons: 1.  
4 (b)(d)

¶1. (SBU) Shinzo Abe's first trip to Europe as Prime Minister is intended to strengthen Japan's ties with its "natural partners," according to MOFA Western Europe Division Director Akira Kono. Abe's five-day tour of London, Berlin, Brussels and Paris starts on January 9 in London where Abe will meet Prime Minister Tony Blair. On the 10th, he will meet Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin, and pay a courtesy call on Federal President Horst Kohler. In Brussels on the 11th, Abe will call on EC President Jose Barroso and Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. The following day, January 12, he will meet with NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer and address the North Atlantic Council (NAC), an event Kono described as the highlight of the trip. Abe will travel to Paris that evening for a working dinner with President Jacques Chirac. On the 13th, he will wrap up his trip with a solo press conference and then depart for Cebu, the Philippines, to attend the East Asia Summit (postponed from December).

¶2. (C) The primary purpose of Abe's European tour is to establish personal relationships with key European leaders and to exchange views on a range of issues, Kono explained. In bilateral discussions, Abe is expected to focus on East Asian security, including North Korea and the importance of maintaining the EU arms embargo on China. He will also address UN reform, Iran, and development assistance (particularly in Africa). The trip will not give much attention to commercial matters except in Belgium, where a social security agreement will be signed. In Britain and France, Abe will also meet with "future leaders," Kono confided. In London he will meet with Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer who is presumed to be Tony Blair's successor as Labour Party leader. He will also meet with opposition Conservative Party leader David Cameron. In Paris, Abe will meet with the leading contenders in the April presidential election, Socialist Party leader Segolene Royal and center-right politician (Union for a Popular Movement) Nicolas Sarkozy.

¶3. (C) In his meetings, Abe will also stress "shared basic values," including democracy and respect for human rights, in line with the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" concept outlined in a recent major foreign policy speech by Foreign Minister Aso, Kono remarked. Abe is expected to develop this theme in his speech before the NAC -- the first ever by a

Japanese leader. (Note: In May 2006, FM Aso became the first Japanese foreign minister to speak before the NAC.) The NAC address is viewed as an important step in demonstrating Japan's strong interest in developing closer cooperation with NATO. The address, Kono observed, comes "at the right time," in that it follows NATO's December 12 Riga meeting at which developing closer ties with new partner countries was discussed. PM Abe, he stated, places more emphasis on "values" in his foreign policy than his predecessor Junichiro Koizumi. Pressing forward with closer NATO ties is a "natural progression" in line with this values-based foreign policy, Kono suggested.

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